

Reading Comprehension

What is reading comprehension?

- ◆ Reading comprehension is the construction of meaning through the application of intentional, problem solving processes while interacting with written text. The National Reading Panel (2000) explains that “the content of meaning is influenced by the text and by the reader’s prior knowledge and experience that are brought to bear on it” and that “reading is purposeful and active.”

Why should comprehension be taught?

- ◆ Comprehension is the ultimate goal of reading.
- ◆ Adults who qualify for Adult Basic Education classes are often unable to integrate and synthesize information from longer or more complex texts (Kruidenier, 2002).
- ◆ Adults with learning disabilities tend to have lower functional literacy comprehension achievement (Kruidenier, 2002).
- ◆ Although there are limited studies on the reading comprehension of adults, the results of these studies suggest that explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies does result in improved comprehension. This research is supported by the findings of the National Reading Panel (2000), which found that children’s reading comprehension can be improved by instruction in using specific cognitive strategies or in reasoning strategically when encountering barriers to understanding.

Evidence-Based Instructional Practices: ADULTS (Kruidenier, 2002)

- ◆ Assess learners to determine reading comprehension ability and to measure progress in the acquisition of reading comprehension strategies. Also consider secondary issues that may impact reading comprehension, such as cultural and language differences in ESL students; learning disabilities; alphabets and vocabulary knowledge; and fluency in word reading.
- ◆ Provide explicit instruction in reading comprehension strategies.
- ◆ Provide instruction in comprehension along with instruction in other components of reading (word analysis, fluency, and vocabulary).
- ◆ Research suggests:
 - Teachers may need to **use more than one measure** of reading comprehension to obtain useful information for diagnosis and program evaluation; **knowledge of comprehension strategies should be assessed and taught**.
 - **Workplace or family literacy programs** may increase learners’ reading comprehension more readily than general literacy programs.
 - Teachers should include **adult-oriented material**.
 - Teachers should **attend to enabling factors**, such as how a classroom is organized or how comfortable adults are in the setting.
 - Teachers should deal briefly but directly with issues of **motivation**, especially **adults’ perceptions** of their reading ability and the importance of reading (self-efficacy).

Evidence-Based Instructional Practices: CHILDREN (NRP, 2000)

- ◆ Provide explicit instruction and practice in the following:
 - **comprehension monitoring:** readers learn to be aware of when they do not understand the text and how to use fix-up strategies.
 - **graphic and semantic organizers:** readers make graphic representations, including story maps, of the material to assist comprehension.
 - **question answering:** readers answer questions posed by the teacher and receive immediate feedback.
 - **question generating:** readers learn to ask themselves questions about various aspects of the text.
 - **story structure:** readers learn to ask and answer who, what, where, when, and why questions about the plot and/or to map out the time line, characters, and events in stories.
 - **summarizing:** readers learn to identify and write the most important ideas that integrate separate ideas or meanings into a coherent whole.
 - **multiple strategy instruction:** students learn to use a combination of strategies appropriate for the reading task.
- ◆ Provide tasks that demand active involvement.
- ◆ Scaffold new learning, gradually withdrawing the amount of assistance offered to the learner.
 - Direct explanation
 - Modeling
 - Guided practice
 - Application
- ◆ Engage learners in cooperative learning, in which readers instruct or interact with each other to learn text comprehension strategies.
- ◆ Encourage students to use comprehension strategies flexibly and in combination.

Sources

Kruidenier, John (2002). *Research-Based Principles for Adult Basic Education Reading Instruction*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy, Partnership for Reading.

National Reading Panel (2000). *Teaching Children to Read: an Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and its Implications for Reading Instruction (Report of the Subgroups)*. Washington, D.C.: National Institute for Child Health and Human Development.